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NOTES ON THE *CUM*-CONSTRUCTION

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Students had comparatively little trouble with the *cum*-construction in the days of old when they learned that “*cum* temporal is used with the imperfect and pluperfect subjunctive, and with the indicative of other tenses.” But great confusion entered, especially in the writing of Latin, as soon as the grammars attempted to base a rule upon the studies of scholars who advanced rival theories as to the significance of the presence of the subjunctive in *cum*-clauses generally.

The historical problem surely is one that courts investigation; for, in Plautus, the rule is that *cum* in all its meanings (including the causal and concessive) requires the indicative mood, whereas in less than two hundred years thereafter the subjunctive made such inroads into the construction that the indicative of certain tenses retained but a scanty foothold there.

It is distinctly unfortunate that the literature between the early dramatists and the writers of the Ciceronian period provides so little opportunity to study the various steps by which this shift from the use of the indicative to the subjunctive was accomplished. Lacking complete data, it has become the common practice to advance a more or less a priori assumption as to this matter, and to attempt to interpret the facts of the Ciceronian period in the light of it. Such was the theory of relative and absolute time advocated by Hoffmann; and, to a certain extent, the same holds true of the much more acute study published later by Professor Hale. Upon this latter most of the statements in the school grammars are now based.

As a matter of practice, the writer has found that these statements are thoroughly misleading to the student who is attempting to write Latin in the style of Caesar, the difficulty being in part

due to the fact that the rank and file seem to get no clear conception of the distinction which the terms "circumstantial" and "temporal" are designed to mark. After four years of high-school training, a majority are caught by the word "when," and without hesitation will decide for the indicative in a sentence like the following: "When the news of victory arrived, there was great rejoicing in the city."

But aside from this practical difficulty, the writer has long suspected that the statements themselves are somewhat warped through the attempt to interpret facts in the light of an unproved theory; and it seemed that it might be worth while to subject to careful scrutiny all the cases in which Caesar uses a past tense with *cum*, in order to determine exactly what the nature of his usage is. Such a study has recently been made;¹ and it is the purpose of this paper to set forth the findings, so far as they bear upon the problem of Latin composition.

A mere statistical summary affords food for thought. Inasmuch as the use of the indicative and subjunctive are to be contrasted, all cases are excluded where the subjunctive of a *cum*-clause could be otherwise explained, e.g., supposing the *cum*-clause to be dependent in indirect discourse. The following table includes all other *cum*-clauses in which Caesar uses either the indicative or the subjunctive of past tenses:

	Subjunctive	Indicative
Imperfect.....	248	5
Pluperfect.....	176	11
Perfect.....	2	17

At a glance it will be seen that, in these tenses, Caesar's usage affords no basis for a "grand division" of "purely temporal" *cum*-clauses with the indicative. Even on the surface it is fairly obvious that, in the imperfect and pluperfect tenses at least, the subjunctive has invaded clauses that may properly be called "temporal"; for otherwise we must assume that Caesar had but little or no occasion to write purely temporal *cum*-clauses in those tenses. But the full significance of the figures does not appear

¹ "Caesar's Use of Past Tenses in *Cum*-Clauses," *University of California Publications, Classical Philology*, V, No. 1. University of California Press. 55 cents.

until the indicative cases are examined in detail. Taken by tenses, the groups are made up as follows:

1. Imperfect indicative. Of the five cases, three¹ are of repeated action. *B.G.* i. 40. 5, curiously enough, is a dependent clause in indirect discourse; hence some editors doubt the MS reading. The remaining case (*B.C.* ii. 17. 4) is questioned also; it is quite possible there that *postea . . . cum* (i.e., *quom*) is a corruption of *postea . . . quam*.

2. Pluperfect indicative. All eleven cases are of repeated action.

3. Perfect indicative. Of the seventeen cases, nine are in conditional relative sentences of the *present* general type, e.g.:

B.G. vi. 19. 3: *Cum* pater familias illustriore loco natus *decessit*, eius propinqui conveniunt.

The other eight cases are distributed thus: (a) *cum inversum*, 2; (b) *cum primum*, 1; (c) text doubtful, 3; (d) pure temporal of the past, 2.²

If now we combine the figures for all three tenses and eliminate special uses such as repeated action and *cum inversum*, along with examples of doubtful text, Caesar's entire use of past tenses of the indicative in bona fide temporal clauses of the past is reduced to just *two* occurrences of the perfect tense, one of which is found in a letter written by Caesar to Cicero. Thus, in the whole extent of the Gallic and the Civil Wars there is only one sure case of a past tense of the indicative in a "purely temporal" *cum*-clause.

Hence if Caesar wrote any considerable number of temporal *cum*-clauses of the past, we must look elsewhere for them. And if we were not prejudiced by a preconceived theory, we should readily recognize them among the examples with the subjunctive, as is shown in detail in the paper above referred to.³ Indeed, the

¹ *B.C.* ii. 17. 4 (*bis*), already cited above as doubtful (*postea . . . quom* for *postea . . . quam?*), and *B.C.* iii. 87. 7.

² *B.G.* vi. 12. 1, and apud Cic. *ad Att.* x. 8. B. 1.

³ The demonstration there given will probably convince most open-minded readers. But if any still cling to Professor Hale's theory as explaining Caesar's usage, and urge that the lack of past indicatives with *cum* is an evidence that Caesar had no occasion to write purely temporal *cum*-clauses of the past, such are reminded that Professor Hale himself insists more than once (*Cum-Constructions*, II, 195 and 254) that *postquam*, *ubi*, and *ut*, with the perfect indicative are not equivalent to purely temporal *cum*-clauses, but rather are convertible into qualifying (i.e., circumstantial) *cum*-clauses. If then *cum*, *postquam*, *ubi*, *ut*, etc., do not introduce purely temporal clauses of the past, where are we to look for such clauses?

onset of the subjunctive is so strong that it has begun to oust the indicative even from clauses of repeated action; e.g.:

*B.C. iii. 47. 6: Non illis hordeum cum daretur, non legumina recusabant.*¹

*B.C. ii. 41. 6: Cum cohortes ex acie procucurrissent, Numidae integri celeritate impetum nostrorum effugiebant.*²

In the light of these facts, it certainly is unfortunate that the grammars accept without question an a priori theory and put before the student a rule that leads him to expect that among the *cum*-clauses of the past he will find a "circumstantial" group with the subjunctive balanced by a like group of "purely temporal" cases with the indicative. This entirely misrepresents Caesar's usage at any rate, and cannot fail to mislead a person who wishes to write in his style. The situation is aggravated by the fact (already noted) that comparatively few students understand the distinction which the terms "circumstantial" and "temporal" are designed to mark; many seem to have the impression that almost any "when"-clause is a call for the use of the indicative with *cum*. So far as the writer's observation extends, the attempt to teach this construction through an unproved theory as to the reason why the subjunctive mood originally began to invade the *cum*-construction has been anything but a success.

As a matter of fact the great majority of students who begin Latin do not carry the subject beyond the second year. Such pupils will never be called upon to attempt to write Latin in anything else than the style of Caesar. Therefore the question is seriously raised whether, in the two first years, it is really necessary to perplex and mislead the student with an abstract philosophy of the *cum*-construction, which may be either correct or incorrect. If we are content to ask no more than an imitation of Caesar, and are willing to set for translation into Latin only such sentences as are Caesarian in subject-matter, the whole troubled question of the mood with *cum* can be disposed of very briefly; for Caesar's usage allows of compendious summarizing:

1. Causal and concessive—subjunctive of all tenses

¹ Cf. *B.G.* vii. 16. 3, and perhaps ii. 20. 1.

² It may not be without interest in this connection to note that there is one case of *cum primum* with the imperfect subjunctive (*B.G.* ii. 2. 2), as against the single case of *cum primum* with the perfect indicative (*B.G.* iii. 9. 2).

2. Circumstantial-temporal:

a) Present and future—indicative

NOTE.—The perfect indicative is very rarely found (two sure cases in Caesar), except in special uses; e.g., *cum primum*, *cum inversum*, and conditional relative sentences of the *present* general variety.

b) Imperfect and pluperfect—subjunctive

NOTE.—But in clauses of *repeated* action (*cum* = “when-ever”) the indicative of these tenses is more common than the subjunctive.

Such disposition of the subject is not at all spectacular; but the foregoing outline at any rate has the merit of being based on tangible facts, and not upon an unproved theory; moreover, it is plain and simple and hardly likely to confuse even students of small ability. It is true that for the somewhat more select group of pupils who go on into third-year Latin some amplification of the scheme would be necessary. However, little difficulty is apprehended at this point; for, though work upon Cicero’s use of the *cum*-clause is hardly more than begun, already it is clear enough that in his writings, too, the subjunctive has penetrated into the purely temporal group—and this really is the crux of the whole matter. See the following examples:

Tusc. Disp. ii. 14. 34: Spartae vero pueri ad aram . . . verberibus accipiuntur . . . nonnumquam etiam, ut, *cum ibi essem*, audiebam, ad necem.
in Cat. iii. 2. 5 ff.: Negotium susceperunt, et, *cum advesperasceret*, occulte ad pontem Mulvium pervenerunt. . . . Interim, *tertia fere vigilia exacta*, cum iam pontem Mulvium magno comitatu legati Allobrogum ingredi inciperent . . . fit in eos impetus. . . . Ipsi comprehensi ad me, *cum iam dilucesceret*, deducuntur.

The second of these passages is especially interesting because of the succession of “time-defining” devices. The praetors go to the bridge “at nightfall”; the attack is made “at almost the end of the third watch”; and the prisoners reach Cicero’s house “just at dawn.” No one would think of calling the ablative construction anything but a time-defining device; and what is true of it is equally true of the *cum*-clauses.

Long experience in teaching Latin composition has convinced the writer that there is little danger of making rules too clear and

definite and specific. However, it is not anticipated that the simplification of procedure here proposed will at once find general favor, partly because it has become the established practice to interpret the facts of Latin syntax in the light of general principles, which too often are based on a priori assumption rather than upon impartial examination of all the facts available.

In regard to the study of the evolution of the *cum*-construction, it is a matter for regret that (as noted above) the literary remains are scanty for the period when the subjunctive was rapidly pushing its way into that construction; but the lack of complete data at this point surely does not excuse us from careful and unprejudiced examination of such material as is actually in hand.

Yet for the last fifty years the study of this particular problem has been characterized by fitting facts to a theory, and not by impartial examination of the facts. This fault in method has contributed also to the neglect of a circumstance which the above-mentioned study of Caesar's usage has shown to be of prime importance, namely, the fact that the problem of the *cum*-construction is stylistic as well as syntactical.

Thus, for purposes of syntax study, it is customary to reduce constructions to bare types; e.g., for the *cum*-construction types like the following may be set up:

Type 1: Cum.....esset,fuit
 Type 2: Cum.....erat,fuit

Then the question is raised: Why *esset* in one case and *erat* in the other? Hoffmann leaped to the conclusion that the subjunctive expresses "relative" time and the indicative "absolute" time. On the other hand, Professor Hale would approach *cum* (i.e., *quom*) as an offshoot of the pronominal stem *qui*, finding in the subjunctive clause a qualifying (i.e., characteristic) expression, and in the other a determinative expression.

How far afield these abstractions are from the actual facts of the case appears at once when we turn to a Latin text. It is Caesar's task to tell a series of longer or shorter stories; and, in order to do this without monotony, he more or less consciously strives for variety of expression; e.g.:

B.G. iv. 15. 1: Germani, post tergum *clamore audito*, *cum* suos interfici *viderent*, *armis abiectis* *se ex castris eiecerunt*.

This little story consists of four items, which follow one another chronologically: (1) The Germans hear the shouting behind them; (2) they look back and see their friends falling; (3) they throw away their arms; and (4) they dash out of camp.

Had Caesar so chosen, he might have told this story by means of four co-ordinate clauses connected by *et* or *-que*; but the stylistic effect would have been unfortunate. He has done far better to introduce the successive items in the development of the action by means of: (1) an ablative absolute, (2) *cum* with the subjunctive, (3) an ablative absolute, and (4) a perfect indicative.

The point that needs to be noticed particularly in the present instance is that logically the *cum*-clause is just as closely related to what precedes as it is to what follows; in other words, it *links* the action of the clause before to the action of the following clause. The same is true of the ablative absolute. Thus, in Caesar's hands, the ablative absolute and *cum* with the subjunctive are made stock properties or stylistic devices, which in varying combination are used to portray attractively the successive stages of a developing situation.

Any chance of understanding the real nature of the usage is lost if we proceed to isolate the above *cum*-clause from what precedes, reduce the case to the skeleton form *cum* *viderent*, *se* *eiecerunt*, and then raise the question whether the subjunctive was chosen to express "relative" time, or because the *cum*-clause "qualifies" an implied antecedent in the main clause. That sort of treatment is simply absurd. As Caesar wrote the sentence, no such considerations were in his mind, even subconsciously. In this particular use (and it is a very frequent one) the subjunctive mood with *cum* was as much a matter of course as the joining of a subject and predicate to form an ablative absolute.

It is not the place here to discuss Caesar's methods of period building; but it is worth while to add one more example in which, by adding the nominative of the perfect participle as a third stock property, he finds it possible to cover the events of a considerable episode in a single sentence:

B.G. iii. 22. 4: Adiatunnus eruptionem facere *conatus*, *clamore* ab ea parte munitionis *sublato*, *cum* ad arma milites *cucurrissent* vehementerque ibi *pugnatum esset*, *repulsus* in oppidum, tamen uti eadem deditionis condicione uteretur a Crasso impetravit.

To sum up, then, there is a very strong case against the conventional treatment of the *cum*-construction in the school grammars of the day. In the first place, it is based on an unproved theory; second, it does not accord with the actual usage of an author like Caesar; and, third, it turns upon a distinction which many pupils and some teachers do not understand. For the student of Latin composition (and this is the real test of a rule) it proves in the highest degree misleading.

Consequently, whether teachers are ready to adopt the suggestion of this paper or not, the fact remains that the attempt to teach students to handle the *cum*-construction in Caesar's style will probably continue to be a failure until some better method of presentation is found than the one now in current use.